

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 SURABA 00614 190324Z

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA

TO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 0502

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL MEDAN

S E C R E T SURABAYA 0614 SECTION 3 OF 3 0614

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PT, ID

SUBJECT: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR

WE WERE FORCED TO SIGN IN AND OUT OF THE HOTEL, AND WERE ONLY SUPPOSED TO EAT AT A SPECIFIED RESTAURANT. WE FINALLY MADE CONTACT WITH A FORMER JAKARTA USIS LOCAL WORKING FOR ZAMRUD AIRLINES IN KUPANG, AND HE TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNOR'S REAL CONCERN WAS THAT AN INDEPENDENT PORTUGUESE TIMOR WOULD SET A DANGEROUS EXAMPLE FOR THE TIMORESE ON THE INDONESIAN SIDE OF THE BORDER, WHO HAVE BEEN RULED BY JAVANESE AND ROTINESE FOR DECADES. AGAIN, WE HAD NO WAY OF VERIFYING HIS STATEMENTS, BUT EVERY OFFICIAL WE MET WAS INDEED EITHER JAVANESE OR FROM THE ISLAND OF ROTI.

10. IF INDONESIA ATTEMPTS A MILITARY MOVE, IT MIGHT NOT GO SMOOTHLY. THE GOVERNOR IS A CAPABLE OFFICER WHO HAS DEVELOPED A REALISTIC PLAN FOR THE YEAR AHEAD AND HAS FULL AUTHORITY FROM LISBON TO IMPLEMENT IT. HE MIGHT WELL DECIDE TO FIGHT IF INDONESIA USES PHYSICAL FORCE AGAINST THE PROVINCE. HE HAS 1,000 PORTUGUESE

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PAGE 02 SURABA 00614 190324Z

RIFLEMEN, ORGANIZED INTO FOUR COMPANIES, AND 3,000 TIMORESE WHO

HAVE HAD MORE THAN THREE YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE, INCLUDING GUERRILLA TRAINING. HIS PORTUGUESE TROOPS ARE VETERANS OF ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE, AND HIS OFFICERS SEEM MARKEDLY PRO-PORTUGAL THOUGH NOT COLONIALIST. NO ONE SPEAKS INDONESIAN IN THE PROVINCE, AND THERE IS NO MEANINGFUL SUPPORT FOR ENOSIS AMONG THE POPULATION, 90 PERCENT OF WHICH IS ILLITERATE AND TRIBAL. MANY OF THE TRIBAL LEADERS FOUGHT WITH THE AUSTRALIANS AGAINST THE JAPANESE DURING WORLD WAR TWO, WHEN MORE THAN 100,000 TIMORESE REPORTEDLY DIED, AND THEY TEND TO CORRELATE A THREAT FROM INDONESIA INFERRED FROM RADIO KUPANG'S PROPAGANDA WITH BITTER MEMORIES OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION. REF. A SUGGESTS THAT INDONESIAN FORCES IN THE AREA ARE MINIMAL AND UNPREPARED. LOGISTICS WOULD BE A NIGHTMARE.

11. AT THIS FORMATIVE STAGE OF TIMORESE POLITICS, ALL SIDES ARE LOOKING FOR A NEW PATRON, AND THE USA IS THE PRIME CANDIDATE. PARTIALLY THIS IS BECAUSE THEY HOPE WE CAN EXERT RESTRAINING PRESSURE ON INDONESIA, AND PARTLY BECAUSE OUR SUPPORT FOR SOUTH VIETNAM IS INTERPRETED AS EVIDENCE OF AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO DEFEND ALL WEAK EX-COLONIAL STATES THREATENED BY STRONGER BELLIGERENT NEIGHBORS. THOUGH I EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE COMPLIMENT, I TRIED TO PERSUADE THE TIMORESE ELITE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER THAT THE AMERICAN VIEWPOINT WAS NOT DECISIVE, AND THAT WE BELIEVED THE PROBLEM SHOULD BE SETTLED BY THE PEOPLE AND COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES. GIVEN A YEAR AND LESS PRESSURE FROM LISBON AND JAKARTA, THE GOVERNOR OF PORTUGUESE TIMOR WOULD PROBABLY MAKE THIS POSSIBLE, AND ACHIEVE TWO OF HIS THREE STATED GOALS. BUT I DOUBT WHETHER EVEN ROBERT MOSES COULD DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE ROADS.

HOWLAND

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